

An Introduction To Quadriplegia

*Grim-visag'd War hath smoothed his wrinkled front;
And now, in stead of mounting barbed steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimble in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleatings of a lute.
But I, that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them—
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to see my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity.*

*Richard III
I.i.9-25*

Twenty-seven years ago, on April 18th 1986, I was involved in a single car accident that left me a quadriplegic. I broke my neck at the fourth and fifth vertebrae. It is a date that, for me, will live in infamy, but I don't think I'll ever recall what I was doing on that day. I've repressed all that! and I think it's all for the better. I was the passenger in the car, and my good friend Brian was driving. It is to Brian that I'm dedicating this month's blog because regardless of what the future holds, he'll always be my very good friend.

If the reader wants to learn more about the mundane and heart-rending activities of daily living that the average quad must suffer, I would like to suggest that she read John Callahan's *Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot!* John is a quadriplegic cartoonist whose incredibly funny autobiography delineates his life in every aspect. (The title of the book is the caption accompanying one of his crudely drawn cartoons wherein a posse of men on horseback surrounds an abandoned wheelchair in the desert.) I haven't experienced alcoholism as he did nor was I adopted, so he experienced some heavy shit that I never have, and hopefully never will, but he explains very well some of the less pleasant aspects of crippledom that all quads must experience with a wit that is really refreshing—no political correctness here and not for the weak of heart... nor the morally annoying!



I was particularly pleased to learn that he had experienced some of the same things I have experienced but thought were my own personally unique stories; his cartoon depicting death by asphyxiation while performing cunnilingus made me cry with laughter; his fear of heatstroke¹ is also pathos-evoking; his anxiety before choosing an attendant really affected me, especially concerning my similar experiences; his worrying about the kind of people who will apply to help him (and I've had some real losers!); his worrying about urine and bowel problems; his anger with the government's welfare/Medicaid/Medicare policies, which, after reading, made me want to do something really mean to those who belittled me in like manner; and his worries about purchasing new wheelchairs and equipment... I totally relate to all his stories concerning paralysis—imagine, if you will, a crippled boy who is totally dependent on someone else, anyone else, to help him with even the most rudimentary acts of daily living, when he is at his most vulnerable, and the worry that comes from having to choose this help from applicants of varying degrees of humanity.

Callahan describes the apathy, the emotional abuse, the dictatorial notions, and the soi disant (self-proclaimed) importance of the governmental case worker so well that I would invariably fail trying to even match it. He even goes above and beyond the call of duty by pointing out the disadvantages of a quad who even tries to better his position in our society... that although it is better than being totally disregarded as pariah, quadriplegia is a condition many would rather not have to confront. Our current system seems to want to keep crippled persons as shut-ins, outside the boundaries of success and out of the sight and mind of those for whom euphemisms were created (see Callahan, Chapter 9). Callahan's book is a must read if one is interested in learning the drags of crippledom, yet Mr. Callahan also tells very funny yet poignant stories.

Before I continue this month's blog, I would like to remind my few readers that I am a hemp-inspired Southern jester, a scobie doobie doo fool whose main objective is to entertain, whether it be through the written word or by singing jazz ballads depends on the opportunity;

¹ Spinal cord injured people don't sweat enough to effectively cool down their body temperatures to normal, healthy levels. The result can be fatal.

however, I abhor hypocrisy and am bound to scathing rhetoric whenever the mood strikes, so it is imperative that the readers of my discursive rhetoric recognize sarcasm, especially considering that I do live in the precious jewel spangled Bible Belt and much of my off-beat humor resides in mocking Christianity—a rampant disease in the South growing more quickly than the mercury level in the Chattahoochee River. (Christianity may very well be rampant *everywhere*, but I only know the South). Victims overcome with symptoms of this pandemic disease become automatons, reciting by rote the same superfluous dogma of their great-grandparents, meaningless rhetorical details that encourage blind obsequiousness from its followers who are likened to unquestioning, innocuous sheep unconsciously preparing for slaughter by perniciously ambitious clergy.

Unfortunately, my South is overrun with the mono-toned, orating Christian, the kind of overly hygienic, charismatic, teeth-gleaming, better-than-thou, thespian soul-saver who cries in public for the preservation of a conservative, spiritual church but who simultaneously breaks the more severe of the rules set by the religious institution in charge of her religious themes.

Although I am a white male who has been given every opportunity to succeed in our nation's lighter hue-lined aristocracy, I will never achieve any significant level of consciousness in my lifetime and am destined to an afterlife of uncertainty along with the millions of others on this planet who blindly go through life as sheep following a possibly pernicious shepherd, but I do have something different to say about life as a quadriplegic, and this is the main reason I've decided to write of my experiences with paralysis. I am not socially refined, and it may be obvious that I don't come from money—I have no blue pigment in my veins. My father worked very diligently to provide for his family. We were by no means the dregs of society, but we were neither lavishing in excess. I may never speak to congress or host a show on HBO, but I believe that my ideas and views on quadriplegia are as interesting and thought-provoking as anything from the plastic world of Hollywood or the aggressive world of professional football.

It is my aim to write stories that are funny or that show a more positive side to a condition about which our society has refused to see even the most rudimentary aspects of humor, the inherent absurdities intrinsic to one's inability to complete even the most menial physical acts of daily living; it's not politically correct to laugh at a crippled boy if he's fallen out of his wheelchair regardless of how obviously funny it is, especially if he's on a busy city sidewalk and nobody else notices.

Even though the subject may be hysterical, I will not write any stories about my love life, or lack thereof, nor will I write essays concerning politics. I'm really not all that bright, and I've been known to get the two mixed up. I was recently asked my views on the middle-east position. I responded that I was in favor of it but my girlfriend didn't like it much; said it hurt her back. As life is an unpredictable hour upon a stage, my monthly blogs will jump from the outrageous to the sublime to the humorous but they are very necessary acts of sincerity in order for my maintaining emotional salubrity. I sincerely hope that you enjoy them.

Peace Through Music